

Urban Biodiversity: Successes and Challenges: Health-promoting environments – is good greenspace good enough?

Deryck Irving

Greenspace Scotland, 12 Alpha Centre, Innovation Park, University of Stirling FK9 4NF

E-mail: deryck.irving@greenspacescotland.org.uk

In 2009/2010 greenspace scotland worked with NHS Health Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, Glasgow City Council and the Dundee Environment Partnership to develop and publish what is known as an outcomes framework showing how work to create, maintain and manage greenspace can contribute to the delivery of national and local health priorities (greenspace scotland, 2010). An outcomes framework is a linked series of logic models which draw on available evidence to demonstrate the connection between planned actions and desired outcomes. This knowledge and approach can help practitioners to better make the case for investing time and resources into greenspace and to improve the planning and evaluation of what we do 'on the ground'.

Our research project used eight pieces of greenspace work and a review of existing research literature. The work was set in the context of national health priorities which are expressed and interpreted at a local level. We considered three outcomes - increased levels of physical activity; enhanced mental health and wellbeing; reduced health inequalities - which partners felt could easily be linked to greenspace. These were a synthesis of outcomes contained in the Dundee and Glasgow Single Outcome Agreements.

This work allowed us to draw a series of important conclusions:

People need to use and/or value greenspace to derive the maximum health benefits.

Most of the health benefits reported in the research require either direct interaction with the environment or some level of positive personal response to the environment.

Simply creating or preserving greenspace is not enough.

Not all greenspace is beneficial to health – poor spaces can be detrimental to mental health and wellbeing and deter people from taking physical exercise; they can become the places which communities avoid rather than the places where they come together. The potential health benefits of greenspace are only realised if we have the right distribution and mix of spaces.

Appropriate management is crucial.

The potential for delivering health benefits is dependent on how we manage the spaces that we have. Inappropriate or inflexible management approaches can often exclude people from spaces and fragment communities.

Promotion of healthy uses of greenspace is also essential.

All spaces need some form of active management and promotion of use (even if this is as simple as encouraging local people to adapt spaces to their own uses) - but it goes further than this. Particularly when we look at tackling health inequalities, many of our 'target audience' do not have a culture of using spaces. In such cases, it may be necessary to combine appropriate management of spaces with targeted support for use (from simple publicity and promotion through to behavioural change programmes such as health walks or gardening clubs).

If we are genuine about tackling inequalities, our resources and actions have to be targeted.

Simply improving greenspace (even in ways that are designed to provide healthy environments) will not reduce health inequalities. In practice, what is likely to happen is that those who are most disposed to use greenspace will use it more while many of those experiencing health problems which might be addressed through greenspace will not. This will widen health inequalities. There is a need, therefore, to actively target our actions either on specific geographical areas; specific communities or people experiencing specific health conditions.

REFERENCES

Greenspace Scotland (2010) *Greenspace and Health Outcomes Framework*. Greenspace Scotland, Stirling ISBN 978-0-95550921-3-8
www.greenspacescotland.org.uk/healthoutcomes/